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FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3696  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
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UNCLAS CONAKRY 000292

SIPDIS  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [GV](#)  
SUBJECT: TAXI DRIVERS ORGANIZE "SPONTANEOUS STRIKE"

1. (SBU) Beginning the morning of May 26, Conakry's taxi drivers parked their vehicles and launched a labor "strike" in protest of recent government decisions affecting the transportation sector. Guinea's transportation union (OUSA-CNTG) did not organize the strike and described the movement as "spontaneous." As such, the workers did not file a pre-notification of intent to strike, which is required by law. However, an OUSA-CNTG contact told Econ LES that the union will support the taxi drivers and will likely offer to negotiate on their behalf. Contact noted that they were planning to meet with Minister of Security, General Toto Camara, at noon today (May 26).

2. (U) According to sources, the taxi strike is in protest of several recent policy decisions issued by the military junta. Early in the year, the Minister of Finance increased the annual "road tax" by nearly 100% from 160,000 GnF (\$32.65) to 300,000 GnF (\$61.22). The deadline for paying this tax is May 31. A few months later, in March, the Minister of Security (Toto Camara) required that all taxis be painted yellow, an expensive prospect for many taxi drivers, although most complied. Camara also announced that taxis could no longer carry more than four passengers at a time, thereby effectively reducing income. Finally, the taxi drivers are claiming that fuel prices have not dropped and there is nothing in place to help compensate them for these additional costs. Both the Finance Minister and the Security Minister are military officers.

3. (U) In a city with few buses or any other means of public transportation, taxis are the backbone of the transportation sector. The streets are routinely crowded with taxis filled to capacity, often carrying up to six passengers stuffed into a sedan. When the taxis are off the roads, many people cannot get to work or school. In the past, such disruptions in transportation services have quickly sparked civil protests, some of which were violent. The quickest group to react is the student population, who rely on taxis to transport them to school and university.

4. (SBU) Just a few hours into the strike, signs of violence were already evident. By 0740, large numbers of youths were seen gathering in the Cosa area. Shortly after that, a Guinean military liaison officer to the Embassy called in to say that the youths had thrown rocks at his vehicle, breaking the back windshield. At 0940, RSO staff reported growing numbers of people in the streets. Some of these people may have been individuals simply walking to their destinations, but angry youths were reportedly shouting and throwing rocks at passing government vehicles. A truck full of riot police (gendarme unit), in full gear, had been stationed at Bambeto Circle, which is the main transportation artery that goes to the Cosa area and the airport. By noon, the situation was quiet and pedestrians and vehicles were moving normally.

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COMMENT

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15. (SBU) There have been rumors of discontent among the taxi drivers for weeks, although such rumors are common. Without a specific union movement, it is difficult to anticipate when feelings of discontent will escalate to a more concrete demonstration. This strike may represent the first real test for CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara and the military junta. Security forces have a poor track record when it comes to quelling civil unrest and they may be even more quick to overreact this time around out of a misplaced zeal to demonstrate their loyalty to the government. The fact that the strike is illegal may add even more zeal to their response.

16. (SBU) At the same time, the strike may present a golden public relations opportunity for Dadis. Since the unpopular policies were instituted by two of his ministers, Dadis could claim that he was unaware of the situation and then swoop in to solve it, thereby emerging as the hero. Given that Dadis has been marginalizing Security Minister Toto Camara for months, this situation also gives Dadis a plausible opportunity to further sideline him.

17. (SBU) At this point, it is unclear what direction this strike might take. It could quickly escalate, but it could also quickly go away. Embassy is closely monitoring the situation. END COMMENT.  
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